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A VIKING'S
LOVE
AND OTHER
Tales - ^{the} NORTH

BY

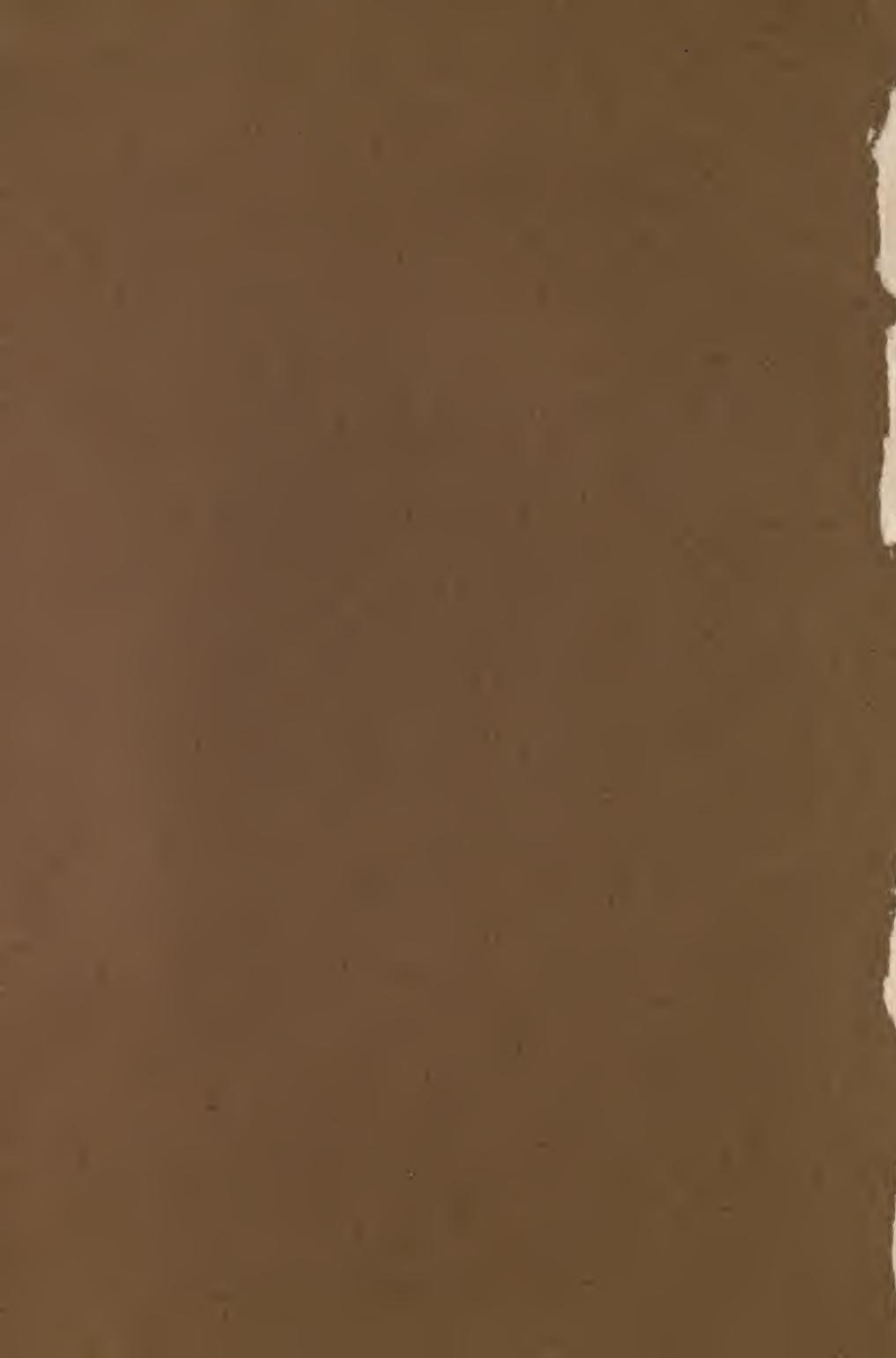
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Æ VIKING'S Love

List of Published Books

By OTTILIE A. LILJENCRANTZ

THE SCRAPE THAT JACK BUILT
Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Co. 1896

THE THRALL OF LEIF THE LUCKY
Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Co. 1902

THE WARD OF KING CANUTE
Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Co. 1903

THE VINLAND CHAMPIONS
New York: D. Appleton & Co. 1904

RANDVAR THE SONGSMITH
New York: Harper & Brothers. 1906

Also: Various Magazine Stories and
Articles published in later years



Drawn by Arthur E. Becher.

“Schooling her how she must put him from her heart and forget him.”

A VIKING'S LOVE

AND OTHER
TALES OF THE NORTH

BY OTTILIE A. LILJENCRANTZ



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OTTILIE A. LILJENCRANTZ

OTTILIE A. LILJENCRANTZ was born in Chicago in 1876, the daughter of Gustave A. M. and Adeline C. Liljencrantz. On her mother's side, she was a descendant of the Puritans; on her father's she could trace her lineage from Laurentius Petrie, an Archbishop in Upsala, a disciple of Martin Luther, and a translator of the Bible in the sixteenth century. The first ancestor to bear the family name was Count Johan Liljencrantz, Councillor of State and Minister of Finance, who was ennobled for his valuable services to the Kingdom during the reign of Gustavus III.

She received her education at Dearborn Seminary in Chicago, graduating in 1903. While her health did not admit of a college course, she took a post-graduate course

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in literature and was always a persistent student in that line. She showed a marked literary taste at an early age. "I was brought up," she said, "on Longfellow and Bret Harte, as well as on the myths and sagas of the North, and wrote my first story at the age of seven, a tragic love story, which was a great deal funnier than anything I have ever written since."

While yet a school-girl, she wrote a number of plays for amateur theatricals, and some short stories. Her first book, "The Scrape that Jack Built," was published in 1896, but the tales of the North, with the daring exploits of its Heroes, were alluring, and she made a thorough and exhaustive study of Northern literature—Paul Du Chaillu's "The Viking Age," "Frithiof's Saga," Rasmus B. Anderson's introduction to Norse Mythology, and nearly forty other works of the same character. Among these should be specially mentioned "Havamal," which comprises the sayings of Odin and is regarded as the laws of the Vikings, and from which quotations appear at every chapter in her two great historical novels, "The Thrall of Leif the Lucky" and "The Ward of King Canute."

Her writings are all morally wholesome, for both the virtues and the vices of her Viking heroes are those of their own times. In the eyes of a Viking, the slaughter of an enemy was not a crime, but a noble and righteous deed; and on the other hand, he would cheerfully lay down his life for a friend.

Ottlie A. Liljencrantz had a most charming personality, and she was an honored member of "The Little Room," "The Chicago Woman's Club," and of the "Lyceum Club" of London.

She died in Chicago on the seventh of October, 1910.

A VIKING'S Love

Æ VIKING'S Love

IT WAS LONG AGO, WHEN THE WORLD WAS SO YOUNG THAT PEACE MEANT LITTLE MORE THAN A BREATHING SPELL BETWEEN BATTLES. AT THE ROYAL FARM OF AUGVALDSNES, IN NORWAY, KING OLAF HARALDSSON SAT AT AN EASTER FEAST WITH HIS MEN.

Right and left on either hand the long tables stretched away, cleared of all their bounty, save two lines of brimming ale-horns. Down the middle of the hall fires burned brightly, flushing the delicate faces of the women on the cross-benches, sending the golden light higher — higher — until every shield upon the tapestryed wall flashed back an answer. Overhead, through the smoke-holes between the sooty rafters, shone the still white stars.

"So, it may be, the eyes of angels look down upon our earthly pastimes," King Olaf said thoughtfully, and his stern face softened with the satisfaction he had in a scene of such orderly good cheer. Rolling his ale on his tongue, he settled himself to listen to a man who had just risen from a place on the left of the high-seat.



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Thorer Sel was the man's name, and he was the bailiff that had this royal farm of Augvaldsnes under his management. As he stood now, a showy figure in the fire-light, he would have been good to look at if his eyes had not been shifty and his mouth coarsely overbearing. He smiled jeeringly at the man who had addressed him.

"So you want to know what took place between me and your friend, Sigurd Asbiornsson, do you?" he asked.

"If you will," the man on the bench answered. "I was away on a Viking voyage last summer when it happened.

Next above this man on the bench sat a tall, broad-shouldered young fellow with a frank, comely face and the air of one amiably used to having his own way. He was the son of King Olaf's most powerful vassal, and his name was Erling Erlingsson. Now suddenly he, too, spoke up.

"I, also, would like to hear that story. If it is true, as I have heard it, then are you the only man in the world who has ever made Sigurd Asbiornsson bow his neck."

Thorer Sel threw him a glance over his shoulder.

"I forgot that it would not sit comfortably in your ears," he said. "It had slipped my mind that the Hægalander is your kinsman."

"Kinsman or not, I like to see justice done to men of courage," young Erlingsson answered. "I say, in the presence of everybody, that Sigurd Asbiornsson is one of the bravest men that ever drew sword or breath."

"The story will show," Thorer Sel said mockingly, and began forthwith.

"To start at the beginning, Sigurd Asbiornsson is the man who came down here from the north and bought



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corn and malt to carry home for the entertaining of his friends, though it was well known to him that because of the bad seasons, King Olaf had forbidden that any meal should be carried out of the south of the country. Dauntless as I am wont, I went down where he had put in under the island for the night and stripped him of his cargo and his fine embroidered sail, and drove him home in disgrace — all in the manner which I will truthfully relate."

"I have seen that you have his sail in your possession," Erling said slowly, "but only he could convince me that you got it without a trick, if you got it against his will."

That was not a bad guess, since the only cause to which the bailiff owed his success was his forethought in providing himself with sixty men, as against Sigurd Asbjornsson's twenty, and in falling upon him at the moment when he and his crew were dressing after a morning swim and stood utterly defenseless against attack. But a guess is only a guess — and no one stood up to confirm it.

"The story will show," sneered Thorer Sel, and proceeded to tell it at great length, with less and less regard for the truth.

He drew it out so long that many of the feasters tired of him and began talking among themselves; but four people continued to listen attentively. One was the Viking who had asked for the tale. Another was Erling, ominously fingering his sword-hilt. A third was a young girl sitting among the matrons on the cross-bench — a beautiful girl who bore her small fair head with brave dignity. The fourth was a strange man in poor attire



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who had come in unnoticed among the servants that were fetching fresh supplies of ale.

The stranger listened the most keenly of all—it almost seemed as if the bailiff might have left him hanging on the words. Step by step, he was drawn forward until only a space of bare table lay between him and the story-teller.

He was a tall man, with a mighty girth of chest and limb. For all that he wore a shabby hat and held a hay-fork in his hand, he did not carry himself like a churl. As he moved from the shadow of the last pillar into the firelight, the girl on the cross-bench stifled an exclamation, and her cheeks went white as the linen before her. "Astrid, my friend, what ails you?" the housewife beside her asked kindly.

A woman on the matron's other side admonished her with a nudge.

"Have you forgot," she whispered, "that Asbiornsson wooed her before her father married her to Hall the Wealthy? Naturally she would be troubled at hearing him ill-spoken of."

Then both forgot her and their gossip and all else.

"How did Sigurd behave when you unloaded his vessel?" the Viking had just inquired.

And the bailiff had answered brazenly: "When we were discharging the cargo, he bore it tolerably, though not well; but when we took the sail from him, he wept."

They were the last words Thorer Sel spoke on earth. While they were still on his lips, the stranger cleared the table at a bound. There was a flaming of warrior-scarlet from under homespun gray, a hiss of steel, the sound of a blow—and then the whole room seemed turning scarlet,



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and the head of Thorer Sel rolled on the table before the king.

"Sigurd!" the girl on the cross-bench cried piercingly.

"Sigurd!" shouted young Erlingsson, leaping to his feet.

After that, it was hard to tell what any one said. Pushing forward in obedience to an awful gesture from King Olaf, guards laid hold of Sigurd Asbjornsson and hurried him from the hall, and thralls came running with towels and water and a board. While some took up what lay heavily among the reeds of the floor, others spread fresh linen, and still others removed the bespattered mantle from the king's shoulders. Only in one thing they all acted alike — no man raised his eyes to the king's furious face.

Of a different mettle was Erling Erlingsson. Coming back from the door through which the guards had led his friend, he came straight up to the high-seat.

"Lord," he said, "I will pay the blood-money for your bailiff, so that my kinsman may retain life and limbs. All the rest do according to your pleasure."

King Olaf's voice was very low. It was his way when his rage was highest.

"Is it not a matter of death, Erling, when a man breaks the Easter peace, and breaks it in the king's lodgings, and makes the king's feet his execution-block? Though it may well be that it seems a small matter to you and your father!" His teeth showed through his quietness.

Erling tried his unpractised tongue at entreaty.

"The deed is ill-done, Lord, in so far as it displeases you, though otherwise done excellently well. But though



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it is so much against your will, yet may I not expect something for my services to you?"

After a little, King Olaf said:

"You have made me greatly indebted to you, Erling, but even for your sake I will not break the law nor cast aside my own dignity."

By a gesture he forbade a reply, and spoke on, asking what had been done with the murderer.

"He sits in irons, upon the doorstep, with his guard," Erling said, heavily.

Then he roused himself to ask one thing which he thought might not be denied him.

"Lord, it is a year since I have seen him, and we have been blood-brothers since we were children. Give him into my charge this one night, and I will answer for him in the morning."

After a long time, King Olaf said grimly:

"It is true that to hang a man after sunset is called murder. Take him, then, for the rest of the night. But know for certain that your own life shall pay for it if he escape in any way."

"It must be as you will," Erling answered, and went out of the feasting-hall that but a short while before had seemed to him a place of such good cheer.

Upon the doorstep, ironed hand and foot, Sigurd Asbiornsson sat listening quietly to the excited expostulations of his guard. Now that the broad-brimmed hat had fallen off, it could be seen that there was nothing blood-thirsty in his handsome sun-brownèd face. Strong-willed and proud and hard, it might be, and yet in some delicate curve of his mouth, some light of his fine gray eyes, lay that which won him, unsought, women's trust



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and men's love. He looked up with a smile to meet Erling's troubled gaze.

"Why take your failure so much to heart, comrade?" he remonstrated. "I came prepared to pay Olaf's price. Stay here by me that we may at least have to-night together, for I suppose he thinks too much of his wonderful laws to hang me before sunrise."

Nodding, Erling turned and spoke to one of the guards, who caught up a hammer and commenced knocking the chains off the prisoner's limbs with far greater alacrity than he had shown in putting them on.

"What is the meaning of that?" Sigurd asked in surprise.

"Olaf has given you into my charge until morning," Erling explained briefly.

For as long as the space between one breath and the next, the prisoner grew tense and alert.

"What pledge did you give for my safety?" he asked quickly.

Less quickly, Erling answered: "My own life."

The half-formed hope faded. Sigurd's mighty frame relaxed.

"I give you thanks," he said, and no more was spoken on the subject.

One by one, the guards drifted back to the ale-horns, and the friends were left alone in the starlit silence of the courtyard. Suddenly, Erling laid hold of the great shoulders before him and shook him fiercely, while at the same time his fingers clung to them in a caress.

"You madman!" he burst out. "Could you not guess that I was going to kill him for you? Olaf dare not slay me — a fine would be the uttermost. What fiend



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possessed you! Did you imagine Olaf loved you because you had always defied his laws? You madman! Did you not know that I would do it for you?"

"Would that have rubbed out my disgrace, if you had done it for me?" Sigurd asked quietly.

He laid his hands on the other's shoulders, and they stood breast to breast and eye to eye.

"Come, come, kinsman, these are useless words; why waste breath on them? If you knew how Thorer Sel spoke to me that morning — spoke to me before my men! — and how the tale spread northward until churls that had never dared sneer behind my back before, taunted me to my face! No, no, it was the only way to do it, boldly and openly, with every one looking on. Now I shall leave a clean name behind me. What more could I do if I lived to be a hundred?"

Erling was silent; only, his hands that rested on his friend's shoulders gripped and held them so that marks were left on the flesh, and the two men remained looking into each other's eyes until a mist came between.

Then, without speaking, they freed each other; and Sigurd said quickly:

"One more thing lies on me to do. Will you help me?"

"I trust there is killing in it," Erling said through his teeth.

"It is to get a message to Astrid, Gudbrand's daughter," Sigurd replied.

Erling cried out in amazement: "The wife of Hall the Wealthy!"

"Hall the Wealthy has been dead two seasons."



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But Erling exclaimed again: "Gudbrand's daughter! Of whom you could not speak bitter words enough—even though you knew they would reach her ear!"

"I spoke unfairly," Sigurd said, flushing. "She sent me a token that I did not receive—I cannot tell you more. I do not ask now that she should stoop to see me herself, but if she would send some woman who has her confidence—if I could speak my message to her with the certainty that it would come truthfully to Astrid's ear—" His dark face flushed redder and redder in the moonlight, and he did not turn away to hide it. "It is the greatest service you could render me, kinsman," he finished.

Stifling an impatient breath, Erling flung the end of his cloak over his shoulder and turned.

"The sooner the better, then—before they are gone to bed. Wait in the herb-garden, yonder. It is the spot where you will be the least liable to interruption."

Netted around with bare bushes and strewn underfoot with shriveled leaves, the herb-garden lay in desolation. Yet even here the slender sides of branches showed the swelling hopes of springtime. A thought came to Sigurd of the budding trees at home, and the harvest he would never reap; then he thrust it from him angrily, and strode up and down the pathway, waiting.

Three times the wind rustling through the bushes tricked him. But at last there was the ring of spurs on gravel, and Erling came out of the shadows, followed by a slender figure wrapped from head to foot in a hooded cloak of blue.

Trying to guess which one of Astrid's women the



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silken folds hid, Sigurd stood gazing at her silently. She halted before him without speaking; but Erling said shortly:

"You have little enough time. I was only able to manage it because Gudbrand is still swilling drink in the hall. The instant I see his torch-bearers, I shall call you."

He disappeared again into the gloom that lay between them and the gate.

Unconsciously, Sigurd's glance must have followed him, for when it came back to the girl, she had answered the question in his mind. The blue hood was thrown back, and the moon shone on a small fair head, upborne with brave dignity, even while the lovely eyes and lips were tremulous.

"Astrid!" he breathed.

She returned his look with the grave steadiness that was a little pathetic in so young a girl.

"For the second time I have lowered the point of my pride to you," she said. "Are you going to make me sorry this time also?"

He began to speak eagerly. It seemed that he would have caught her hands if he had dared.

"Astrid, I was not to blame! I beg you not to believe that I would slight a token from you who have always sat highest in my heart. The churl you gave your rune-ring to — he must have mislaid it, and then feared to give it to me when he found it afterwards. Not until this Spring, when he died and his relation came upon it among his things and brought it to me, did I know that you had sent me a message of love after your father refused to



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bargain with me. Because I was not in the king's service, Gudbrand was even disrespectful in his treatment of me. And the next month, I heard that you had married Hall. And I had had no farewell from you. What could I think but that you had held me lightly, and lightly let me go? What else could I think?"

"You could have remembered that I was helpless," Astrid answered slowly. "Could I wed you against my father's will? Could I hold back from marrying Hall, though he was in everything what I detested most?"

She steadied her lip in her little white teeth.

"You could have believed in me," she said, "as I would have believed in you. Three seasons we had spoken and feasted and ridden together, and when had you ever found me changeable toward my friends, or greedy after gold? You could have believed in me."

"I ought to have believed," Sigurd said humbly.

His face had grown white, as no man had ever seen it. Even when spurs clanked on the path, he stood before her helplessly.

"I ought to have believed," was all he could say.

Moving a step nearer, she laid her hands upon his breast and looked up at him with a little flickering smile.

"You would have believed — if you had loved me as I loved you," she said.

She touched her finger to his lips, as he would have cried out.

"I do not think it is in your nature to feel much love for a woman, my friend. If you had not loved your own way better than me, would you not have entered the king's service to win me, when only that lay between us?"



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Your land — your chiefship over your men — the freedom to do as you pleased — all those you loved; and what was left over, you gave to me. It was not very much, was it? Yet perhaps it does not matter, since I was so glad to get it."

Though her eyes were misty with tears, she held up her mouth to him bravely.

"I give you thanks for telling me," he whispered softly, when he had kissed her.

As Erling's voice sounded urgently, she drew her hood over her head and was gone.

It was a soberly thoughtful man that was pacing the garden-paths when Erling came back. They walked away the rest of the night in silence, while the moon went on in darkness, and the gray dawn which is neither light nor shadow spread coldly over the sky.

It was this new expression which caught King Olaf's eye, when he and his outlaw faced each other again.

With the first burst of morning sunshine, the king came out of the hall on his way to mass, followed by the high-born people of his household. Blinking laughingly in the dazzle, and drawing in great breaths of the fresh sweet air, the retinue made an odd contrast to the other group waiting on the doorstep — three swarthy thralls testing a coil of rope in their hairy fists, and Sigurd Asbjornsson once more ironed and guarded.

King Olaf stopped abruptly.

"How is it that things which I dislike are always kept before my mind?" he demanded. "Why was he not put to death at sunrise?"



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The guard answered that the king had named no definite time, and they feared to misunderstand his will.

"I have seldom heard a poorer excuse," King Olaf returned coldly.

But he did not make his will clearer. He remained scrutinizing the prisoner with a touch of uncertainty in his strongly marked brows. Fearless, Sigurd Asbiornsson looked, as always, but for the first time that something seemed gone from his boldness which had stirred the king's temper against him.

Olaf smiled slowly as a test came to his mind.

"To please your friends, Sigurd," he said, "I will make you an offer which you can do as you like about accepting. It is the law of the land that a man who kills a servant of the king shall undertake that man's service, if the king will. Would you submit to that law, and undertake the office of bailiff which Thorer Sel had, if I gave you life and safety in return?"

He gathered up his mantle to depart, as he concluded, so sure was he that his offer would be rejected. Of all the throng, from Gudbrand's daughter to Erling, not one believed that it stood any chance of acceptance. They almost ceased to breathe when — slowly — with a flaming face and the stiffness of a pride that was cracking at the joints, Sigurd Asbiornsson bent his head and kissed the king's hand.

Not to save his life could he have spoken. His power of speech did not come back to him until the church-goers had swept on across the court, and he was left alone with Astrid in his arms.



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"Do you believe now that I love you?" he asked, raising her face between his hands.

Then it smote his heart that he should even seem to reproach her, and he finished lightly:

"What does it matter? We will make a jest of it between ourselves. Let the world think me the king's man — we know that I am yours!"



THE HOSTAGE



THE HOSTAGE

ISEEK TO TELL OF A DANISH HOSTAGE, CALLED VALGARD THE FAIR, THAT IN HIS YOUTH WAS CEDED TO OUR GREAT ALFRED BY THE DANISH KING GUTHRUM WHEN THEY TWO MADE PEACE TOGETHER IN THE YEAR EIGHT HUNDRED AND SEVENTY-EIGHT.

From Denmark young Valgard came to England in the following of Ogmund Monks-bane, who was his elder brother and Guthrum's first war chief; and though no warrior of more accursed memory than this same Ogmund ever fed the ravens, it was known that toward his young brother alone of all living things he showed a human heart. Wherefore those on whom it lay to choose the hostages were swift to name the comely boy as the one pledge that might clinch the Monks-bane's shifty faith. And that nothing might be lacking, they further fixed it in the bond what would be the fate of Valgard and the eleven other hostages if they that gave them should break any part of their oath; and it was this — that the discipline of the Holy Church should take hold of them, and after that they should die a shameful death.

A snared and a savage man was Ogmund Monks-bane when they brought this word to the tent of skins in which he laired; and it saddened him besides that the boy Valgard strove to contend him, saying:



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"It will be no hindrance to you, kinsman. Never will you so much as think of me when the battle-lust comes on you. And I shall bear it well."

In our king's will at London, therefore, young Valgard grew into man's estate and, contrary to his expectations, throve mightily, discovering a rare aptitude for gentle accomplishments. And for that his heart was noble as well as brave and he was as *débonaire* as he was comely, the king and the royal household came to love him exceeding well until—as the years went by and the peace held—they scarcely remembered that he might one day stand as a scapegoat for loathsomest crimes against them.

Only Vangard himself never for the span of one candle's burning forgot it. Like poison at the bottom of a honeyed cup it lay behind every honor he achieved. Yet even as he had promised his brother, he bore it well and gallantly enough—until, in the sixth year of his captivity, it fortuned to him to fall in love.

She of whom he became enamoured was a young maid in the queen's service, whose rightful name was Adeleve but whom men called Little Nun both by virtue of the celestial sweetness of her face and because of her being but newly come from a cloister school. And in this cloister they had taught her so much of heaven and so little of earth that whenso her heart was taken by Valgard's brave and debonaire ways she knew neither fear nor shame therein, but continued to demean herself with the lovely straightforwardness of an angel or a child. Wherefore Valgard, who was used to women that smiled at him from under heavy lids or drew full red lips into rosebuds of enticement, might not dream that she felt more than friendship. And since in her presence he was



T H E H O S T A G E

always silent and humble as he had been before Our Blessed Lady herself, though elsewhere light speeches sparkled on his lips as bubbles on the clear wine, he wist not for a long time the true name of what he felt.

But one day at that season of the year when the king's household rode often to hunt the wild boar in the woody groves that compassed London round, it happened to Valgard to become separated from the rest and stray alone through still and shadowy glades. There in the solitude, as was ever his unhappy case, his gayety fell away and his forebodings climbed up behind and went with him heavily. Riding thus, it chanced to him to approach the spot where the queen and her maidens tarried and so to come upon the Little Nun herself, that also rode apart, following a brook which sang as it went. Then at last was he made aware of his love, for suddenly it was neither a dislike of death nor any rebellious wish to flee therefrom that possessed him, but solely the dread of being parted from her, which so racked him that he was in very agony.

Now as soon as ever Little Nun perceived that a great trouble was upon him she spoke straight from her heart, though timidly as a child knowing the narrowness of its power, and prayed him to say whether his distress were aught which her love might assuage. When he heard her speak thus sweetly and marked the angelic tenderness of her eyes under her little dove-colored hood, lo! everything fell clean out of his mind before one almighty longing. Descending from his horse, he took her hands and spoke to her passionately, so:

“Tell me whether you love me. My heart cries out for you with every beat. Must it be as the voice of one



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calling into emptiness? Tell me that you return my love and my life will be whole though it end to-night."

The Little Nun's face of cloistral paleness flushed deeply like an alabaster vase into which is being poured the red wine of the sacrament, but her crystalline eyes neither fell nor turned aside.

"I love you as much as you love me — and more," she answered softly.

Whereupon he would have caught her in passionate arms, but that even as he reached this pinnacle of bliss it came back to him how he was a doomed man; and he was as one that is cast down from a height and stunned by the fall.

Anon his voice returned, and sinking to his knee he begged her in broken words to forgive the wrong he had done her in gaining her love, that well knew himself to be set aside for shame and dole and apart from the favor of woman.

To which the Little Nun listened as it might be one of God's angels, bending over the golden bar of Heaven, would listen to the wailing in the Pit. And so soon as he paused she spoke with halting breath.

"Alas, could anything so cruel happen? Ah, no! The peace has held six years — the king believes it firm — and every night and morning I will pray to Our Lady to change your brother's heart."

As she said this, her face bloomed again with her hope. But Valgard only bowed his head upon his hands and groaned; for that albeit he had faith in the Virgin, he knew the nature of Ogmund Monks-bane.

Soon after, constraining himself to hardness for her sake, he rose and drew her away and continued to speak



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with the dulness of one in great pain, schooling her how she must put him from her heart and forget him.

But to that, when she had listened a while with widening eyes, the Little Nun cried out piteously:

“Alas! what then shall I do with my love? It came into being before you called it—it cannot cease at your bidding. Oh, if it be God’s will that we shall have a long life together, then God’s will be done, but make not a thwarted useless thing out of the love which He has permitted me! Let me give it to you. Even though it be too poor to ease you much, yet let me give it! How else shall I find comfort?”

Suddenly, as their eyes met, she stretched out her hands to him with a little sobbing cry that was half piteous and half pitying. And so drew him back, *malgré* his will, until he had put his arms about her where she sat in the saddle above him, when she gathered his head to her breast and cherished it there, with little soft wordless sounds of comforting.

Thus, for that he was so well-nigh spent with struggling, he leaned a while upon her love. And it heartened him. And he lifted his head, thinking to set burning lips to her sweet mouth.

But even as he thought to do this, something in himself or her checked him, so that he kissed instead her small ministering hands. Wherefore the Little Nun remained unstartled and blessedly trustful, and raising her eyes to the blue heavens of which they seemed so much a part prayed softly to Our Dear Lady to keep true the heart of Ogmund Monks-bane.

The fourth morning after this, the queen’s maiden Adeleve was wedded to Valgard the Hostage. And that



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day at noon did our benignant king and his housewifely queen make a marriage feast for the young pair that both of them held dear. A marriage feast, well-a-way!

It happened to the sweet bride to come to it last and alone, for that she had lingered above to pray once more to her on whom she fixed her faith. Blissfully enough she began the descent of the stairs that cored the massive wall; but ere she reached the foot, where a door gave upon the king's hall, dead was her joy. For this is what befell.

First, a quavering shriek as of an aged woman stabbed by evil tidings; and after that a deathlike stillness. Then the door opened and a girl staggered forth up the stairs, her hands groping before her as her staring eyes had been sightless, the while she moaned over and over the name of her soldier lover.

Though she knew not why, little Adeleve shrank from the groping hands and crept by them down the stairs. Whither rose these words in a man's loud voice:

“—but last week came a load of Danish pirates to the shore, reeking of slaughter and gorged with Irish spoil. And every night thereafter a band of them sat at drink with the Monks-bane, stirring his fighting lust, until —”

Here the voice was lost in the outburst of many voices, till it overleapt them hoarsely to answer a question from the king.

“The twoscore English soldiers I named to your grace; besides all the nuns of Saint Helena's that lie stark in their blood —”

Then once again the tumult rose, which now there was no overleaping, and the bride cowering against the



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wall saw how all heads turned toward him who stood opposite the king in the mockery of gay feasting clothes. And suddenly one called down Christ's curse on the race of Ogmund Monks-bane, and a second echoed the cry. Whereat the other Danish hostages — to show that their hands were clean — took up the shout more fierce than any, and smote Valgard so that he reeled under their fists. And the aged woman whose son had been slain flung her cup of wine in his face.

Thereafter the young wife saw only the figure of her doomed lord upon whom it seemed that the curses descended as a visible blight, withering to ghastliness his fresh beauty and blasting his spirit so that he shrank farther and farther from the damning looks and tongues till he might no longer in any wise endure them, but calling in agony upon his God strove with his hands to stop his sight and his hearing. And when presently he became aware of the Little Nun approaching, he cried out to know whether she also was come to curse him, and bent his arms around his head as against a blow.

But even as he did this, he met the anguished love in her eyes and saw how she was laboring to make of her fragile self a buckler for him against the press of crowding bodies; whereupon he caught hold of her shoulder and held to her as a man sinking into Hell might hold to the robe of an angel. Until brutal hands thrust her one way and dragged him the other.

Now the sentence was that he should die at sunrise, unto which time the Church should have him to chasten. And this sentence our king might not alter, for that he was called the Truth-teller and had sworn to take the atonement of life for any breach of the faith. But this

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much he granted, out of the pity and love he had toward the young pair, that they might be together when the end drew near. And stranger than betrothal or marriage feast was this vigil of their wedding night!

Strange was all the world now to the Little Nun, since the arch of her Heaven had fallen about her with the destruction of its keystone, which was her faith in the Virgin. As the white dove of the Ark hovering over a changed earth whereon it might see no familiar foothold, she hung falteringly on the threshold of the king's chapel, while the bells tolled the midnight hour, gazing at the group of deathful men looming amid blended smoke and starlight and torch-glare, at the pitiless shining figure of Our Lady above the altar, at him who stood in grim endurance before it, stripped to naked feet and a single garment of horsehair.

When Valgard felt her eyes and turned his set face toward her, she fluttered to him as the dove to the Ark. But no longer to brood or minister; only to cling to him in utter helpless woe of her helpless love. And when it happened to her hand to touch his horsehair shirt where it was wet with the blood of his atonement, she screamed sharply and was like to go wild with weeping over him and lamenting that she might not bear any of his punishment on her own soft flesh. It was he that kneeling on the stones gathered her to his breast and cherished her, speaking to comfort her such words of resignation as no priest's scourge had drawn from him with his life-blood.

Lo! it was so that from the very helplessness of her love he drew his best strength, that he no longer cared anything at all for his own woe but only for lightening hers. When she cried out piteously that she must always



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fear Christ's Mother now her whole life long, and all the world saving him alone, he spoke with tenderest artfulness, thus:

"For my sake then, heart beloved of my heart! Be brave for my sake — because your tears are the only part of my doom that is heavier than I can bear."

Which was the one plea in all the world that had a meaning for her, so that she tried obediently to choke down her sobs.

Yet which was the easier to bear, her courage or her tears, it were hard to say. When the time of parting came and she had suffered him to loosen her clinging hands and fold them upon her breast and leave her, a little white and shaking figure at the Virgin's feet, it seemed to Valgard looking back that death was easier to him than life, and he pressed with mad haste upon those who went before him to the door.

Now in this vill it was that the king's chapel was hollowed out of the wall of the king's hall; wherefore the opening of the door permitted Valgard and those surrounding him to look down into the great dim room wherein our king kept sorrowful vigil with his knights, and to behold also a man that stood before the high-seat with the mud and mire of the road yet besmirching him. Upon whom Valgard's glance fell amazedly for that he knew him to be a Danish thrall and his brother's trusted slave, albeit the Monks-bane had used him so cruelly that some of his features were lacking.

As the door opened, the thrall began speaking, thus, in the dull voice of one who has neither wit nor will but only dogged faithfulness:

"This is the message of Ogmund Monks-bane, that



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because as soon as he got into his senses again he disliked the thought that he should cause the death of his brother whom he loved, he sends you this atonement."

Saying which, he thrust his hand under his cloak and drew therefrom, by the knotted yellow hair, a bloody head. And the ashen face on the head was the face of Ogmund Monks-bane.

Through stillness, the thrall spoke again. "Do you accept this atonement, king?"

To whom, after a little time has passed, our king answered in a strange voice: "I accept this atonement."

Then, his task being accomplished, the thrall loosed an awful discordant sound of grief; and raising the head between his palms kissed it on either cheek, crying:

"I slew you and I brought you hither because I have never dared go against your will in anything, but even you cannot hinder me from following you now!"

Wherewith he slew himself with the knife he had at his belt. And the sound of his falling body broke the spell, so that the bars of silence were let down and men's voices rushed in like lowing cattle.

Excepting only in the little chapel in the wall. There Valgard stood as a man in a dream, gazing on the dead face of his brother; while the Little Nun, clasping him close, yet lifted awe-filled eyes to Our Lady that thus in her own inscrutable way answered the prayer to keep alive in the nature of an evil man its one good part.

Let us all give thanks that there is such a Lady, and pray that she may harken to us in our need!



AS THE NORNS WEAVE



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HERE WAS A MAN NAMED THOROLF; HE WAS THRAIN'S SON, ERIC THE WHITE'S SON, OF NORWAY. HE KEPT HOUSE AT THOROLFSTEDE, IN THE RANGRIVALES IN ICELAND. HE was an honorable man, and wealthy in goods. His wife's name was Thorhilda, but she does not come into the story for she died the year after she was married to him. The name of their daughter was Rodny. While she was yet in her childhood, it could be seen that she was going to be fair of face, and her eyes were as blue as the sea where it is deepest.

Lambi was the name of another man, a son of Grim the Easterling. He dwelt in the east dales when he was at home, but he was more often at Thorolf's for the bond of friendship was strong between them. He was a true-hearted man, but somewhat soft-tempered. The name of his son was Skapti, and he comes shortly into the story.

Now one spring while Rodny was still a child in years, Thorolf took a sickness and died; but before he breathed his last he spoke to Lambi and asked him to see after his daughter and take in hand the care of her goods, and Lambi gave his word to do that.



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So Thorolf died and was laid in a cairn in the Ran-grivervales, and Lambi came to live at Thorolfstede to see after Rodny and her household. And Skapti, his son, came with him. And so they sat for ten winters, and nothing noteworthy happened.

At the end of that time Rodny was grown up, and the fairest of women to look upon. Some said that she was rather wilful in her temper, but for all that she was one of the best loved of maidens. A fast friend she was, too, and warm-hearted and generous; and the best proof of that is that she never grudged Skapti, Lambi's son, his way about anything.

Skapti was this manner of man. He was so born that one foot was withered and there was a hump on his back, and he never waxed large of frame or sturdy. But in his face he was the most handsome of men, and his hair hung down in long curls of good color. It was thought that his father's rearing had not bettered his disposition. In order that his spirit should not be humbled by his deformity, Lambi praised his face and his wit and all he did, and begged everyone else to do the same; and the upshot of it was that Skapti thought there was no man like himself for dash and keenness, and was always bragging and boasting, and every one had to give way to him or have his wrath. He had a shrewd mind, but he was so spiteful that many were afraid of him.

Now a fourth man is named in the story. He was called Hallvard, the son of Asgrim the White. He owned a good homestead in the Laxriverdales, but he lived more on his longship than on land for every spring he went a-sea-roving. He was the most soldier-like of men, and the best skilled in arms; tall in growth, too, and powerful



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and well-knit. Some said that his wits were rather slow because he lived so much where it was of most importance that hands should be quick; still for all that he was fair-spoken and bountiful, and better liked and more humble than any other man.

It happened one spring that he rode to the Assembly, with all his shipmates at his back. Many great chiefs were there besides, but everyone said that no band was so soldier-like as his; and a group of women that stood near the booths of the Rangrivelvale men turned their heads to look after him; and one of them who knew him called out merrily and bade him stop and talk to them.

He got red in his face at that, for his mates were much given to gibes and jeering; still he would not refuse her; so he rode back and got off his horse and greeted her well, and told her all the news she wished to hear. It is told about his dress that it was of red-scarlet and very showy, and he had on his head a gilded helmet that King Sigurd had given him, and his face was brown from the sea-winds.

Now the maiden that stood next to the one that had hailed him was Rodny, and no woman there was as fair as she. She was so clad that she had on a kirtle of a rich blue color that trailed behind her when she walked, and a silver girdle around her waist. Hallvard could not keep his eyes off her as he talked, until his tongue began to blunder and say the same thing twice over. Rodny kept her feelings better in hand; still it could be seen that she listened eagerly to everything he said, and the color trembled in her cheeks as the Northern Lights tremble in the sky.

As soon as he got a chance to speak apart with the



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woman he knew, Hallvard asked her what maiden that might be. The woman told him; and then she managed it so that he should talk alone with Rodny, though the others stood near and spoke among themselves. And they talked together a long time; though sometimes there were silences between them, but neither of them seemed to mind that.

At last Hallvard said: "Many strange wonders have I seen abroad, yet the thing which seems strangest to me I see here in Iceland."

"What is that?" says Rodny.

"It is that a maid like you should be unwed."

"Oh!" says Rodny.

Hallvard said: "It is easily seen that you would be thrown away on any match you should make; yet that would not hinder me from trying my luck if you thought me good enough to ask for you."

She was rather slow in answering that, but at last she spoke in a well-behaved way and said there could be no two minds about that since every one thought him a man of the greatest mark.

"I might be all that," said Hallvard, "and still not be at all to your mind. I should be glad if you would say that you would have nothing in your heart against such a bargain."

Then Rodny could no longer keep herself altogether in hand, and she began to laugh a little and said that he was hard to deal with, and that perhaps if she should say that she had nothing against the bargain, he might answer that that was too bad because he had no mind to it. But the end of her jesting was that she broke off without



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finishing, for he got red in his face again, and it could be seen that he was much in earnest.

"I should have thought that the risk as to that lay all on my side," he said, "but now I will say right out that my life will never seem good to me again unless I get you to wife."

Then Rodny answered him well and straightforwardly, and said: "From what I have seen of you so far, I think I could love you well; but you must see my foster-father, Lambi, about it; though it will go as I say in the end."

After that they left off speaking together.

But the next day Hallvard came to Lambi's booth, and all his shipmates with him to show him honor, though they had gibed much when they first heard what he had it in mind to do.

Skapti sat in front of the booth entertaining himself with the antics of a tumbling-girl, that cut capers there while an old man played on a fiddle. The man's name was Kol, and his nickname was Fiddling Kol. Jofried was the name of the girl, and she was Fiddling Kol's daughter. She had on a man's kirtle, and she was well-shaped and not ugly of face, though one could tell by her mouth that she was determined in disposition. They were vagabond folk, that went from house to house and lodged where they could. Skapti always talked with the girl because she had the greatest store of gossip at her tongue's end; while on her side it could be seen that she set a value on every look he gave her.

Hallvard greeted Skapti kindly, and his mates did the same, for when they saw his deformity they thought



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that there was more than enough that was wanting in his life; and Skapti took their greeting well because it seemed to him that they could not but be envious of the fairness of his face. And so they talked together smoothly, for a while, and Skapti offered to give them his help about their errand — whatever it might be — and sent a man to call Lambi out, when he heard that that was what they wanted; but he himself went back to his sport with the tumbling-girl.

Lambi came out of the booth at once, and gave them a good welcome. After that they fell to talking, and Hallvard asked for Rodny, and added that he had spoken to her about it and the match was not as far from her mind as might have been expected.

Now Lambi had long had it at heart to wed Rodny to his son, and there was no bargain that he would not have been more willing to make than this one. And at the same time he knew that it would be pulling an oar against a strong current to go against Rodny's will. So he held his peace for a while, and after that he answered in this way:

"Every Spring since you have been able to stretch your hand over a sword, Hallvard, you have fared abroad; and for all that we in Iceland can tell, you may have wooed a maiden in every land your ship has touched. It is said that the sea's own fickleness soaks into the bones of them who live on her, and many a man has done such things and been thought no less of. But with Rodny I will not have it so, and these are the terms I lay down. You shall sail abroad as you had the intention to do, and there shall be no betrothal between you; but if you think of her often enough while you are gone so



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that four times during the summer you send a man out to Iceland to greet her from you, then when you come home in the Autumn the bargain shall be made. But if you do not think of her that often, it is unlikely that she would get any pleasure out of her love even if she were wedded to you, and you shall not get her."

Hallvard said at once: "I agree to those terms. And now let us take witnesses."

So they stood up and shook hands, and the bargain was struck; though Hallvard's friends murmured among themselves and said that such terms ought not to be laid down for a man like Hallvard.

Then Hallvard said: "I only make this condition — that Rodny should give me her word not to betroth herself to any other man while I am gone."

"I have no fault to find with that," said Lambi.

So he sent for Rodny, and she came thither, and with her three women. She spoke to them all well and courteously; and after that she sat down, and Lambi told her all about the bargain and left nothing out.

It could be seen from her way that she thought the terms far too strong. And when she heard what it was that Hallvard wanted of her, she answered without waiting:

"I will promise that, and more besides. I will promise that when his ship comes to land in the Autumn, I will come down half-way between my house and the shore to meet him, that some honor may be done him, as too much has not been shown so far."

Hallvard said that it was honor enough that he got the right to woo her, still he would not fling back the kindness she offered him; and they made a bargain about



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that also. After that, they bade each other farewell, and Hallvard and his friends rode away to their booth.

Now it must be told how Skapti wearied of his pastime and came in and asked his father what it might be that Hallvard wanted, and Lambi told him of the bargain he had made.

At first it looked as Skapti could not believe it, and then it seemed as if he would never leave off scolding.

"Now," he said, "it is proved true what I have long suspected, that you are a doting old man that no longer knows how to behave with sense, when you thus give away to another man the woman that I have always had it in my own mind to marry."

So he went on, and made it known in every way that he thought he had been wrongfully used.

Then Lambi said: "You take it ill, kinsman, and there is some excuse for you. But now this is to be taken into consideration, that Rodny had set her heart on the man, and his honor is great everywhere."

"His body is great," said Skapti, "as big as a bear's; and he shall yet dance to my wit as a bear dances to a willow pipe."

Then they had many words about it, until they were both wroth; and Lambi said:

"There is no use in troubling oneself about what is done and over, but I see now that my rearing has made you crooked in your temper as well, and limping in your sense."

After that he went away; and Skapti flew into a great rage, so that there was no speaking to him; and he laid saddle on a horse and rode without drawing rein until he came to the booths of the Laxriverdale men.



A S T H E N O R N S W E A V E

It happened that Hallvard and his friends were still out of doors; and they were in a merry mood, and drank and made jesting wishes about the bridegroom; and Hallvard wore a joyful face, and took all their jibing blithely.

When Skapti rode up, Hallvard greeted him well and asked him to get down and drink with them. But Skapti began at once to talk in the most ill-tempered way, and the end of his scolding was that he bade Hallvard turn his steps and his thoughts away from Rodney from that time henceforward because he had the intention to wed her himself.

Now in the beginning of his speech it was so that Hallvard looked at him and did not know what to make of him. And in the middle of it, his temper got a little tried. But when he came to the end, Hallvard burst out laughing. And his friends began to laugh, one after the other; and no one took further heed of Skapti, but all went back to their drinking.

It is said that Skapti was so wroth, and had his temper so little in hand, that he wept. Then he went away by himself, aside from other men, and stayed so a long while. After that he rode over the plain until he found Jofried, the tumbling-girl. He talked long and low to her, and no man knew what passed between them. But when they stood up to part, Skapti said this out loud:

"So things shall take this turn, that she shall not come down to meet him when his ship makes land next Fall, nor shall he have courage enough to follow her up in her hall. And then it will be put to proof whether or not I am to be set aside and made game of."

Then the tumbling-girl spoke so as to flatter him,



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and said that she had never heard a plan that promised to work out better.

Skapti swelled out his chest and said: "Jofried, this is how it is, that when I look at the clods around me it seems as if it were given me to know their every weak spot; and I declare with truth that I can take their life-threads and weave them as the Norns weave, and my judgments are no more to be spoken against than theirs!"

After that, Skapti rode home. But Jofried did as he had bidden her and went down to the shore where Hallvard's ship lay, and prayed Hallvard to give her and her father leave to fare abroad with him that they might show their accomplishments to other audiences and increase their goods.

Hallvard gave them leave; and now the story follows the ship for a while.

Shortly after, they got a fair wind and sailed away to sea. Hallvard stood by the steering-oar, but Jofried sat on the deck at his feet. When they could no longer see the land, Jofried began to weep much and bemoan herself, so that Hallvard asked what was on her mind.

Jofried said: "I would give all I own that I had never come hither; and it will stand me in little stead though I get all the goods in Norway, if by going away I lose my chance of Skapti's love."

Hallvard laughed and said: "I did not know before that Skapti got on so well with women. But tell me who it is that you think is likely to rob you of his heart."

"It is Rodny, Thorolf's daughter," said Jofried. "He has always looked upon her with eyes of love, but now I can see by his manner that his love is at the harvest; and



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the likelihood is that they will be wedded before we get back." And as she said this, she wept.

But Hallvard looked as if he did not know whether to laugh or get wroth, and at last he said: "I think there is no need for this to look so big in your eyes, messmate. Skapti sets too much store by himself to love anyone who does not love him, and there is little danger that Rodny will ever do that."

"But she will do it," Jofried answered, "for he is the most handsome man that men ever saw; and his hair is as fine as silk; and there is so much of it that it hides his lame back like a cloak of gold."

"He is a little crooked stick with a gilded head," says Hallvard.

"You can call him that if you want to," said Jofried, "but it only proves what I knew before, that you know nothing at all about women; for with a woman, a gilded head counts for more than a great clumsy body like a dancing-bear's."

Now it had happened to Hallvard, each time he came before Rodny, to feel himself very big and clumsy and out of place; so he got red in his face at that, and went away to another part of the ship, and he and Jofried saw little of each other for a time.

But when they had been out three weeks they came to Norway, and sailed into the Bay there and made land at the King's Crag. And Hallvard went up to the town, where some trading-booths were, and bought a good gold finger-ring and sent it out to Rodny on a ship that stood ready to sail. Jofried praised the ring much, and Hallvard was so pleased at that that he answered her eagerly and said:



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"It is no lie what you say of me, Jofried, that I know little about women; yet this has occurred to me which should also be borne in mind, that Rodny is different from other maidens. I know it for true that she sets great store by weapon-skill and deeds of might, and I tell you for your comfort that she will never give herself away to a man who spends his days kissing the maid-servants by the fire."

But Jofried shook her head and answered: "That may well be, master; and yet Rodny is a woman for all that, and all women think alike. And the proof of that is this, that although I am no more than a gangrel woman, I have the same feelings as a maiden reared in a bower; and to me as to them, all other men look like shambling giants when Skapti, Lambi's son, is by."

In this manner she kept on speaking about Skapti's fairness until it seemed to Hallvard as if it could be no otherwise than so; and he got wroth and said that if it went as she foretold, Skapti would not be so handsome of feature after he got through with him. And after that he was very short with her for a while.

Then they sailed from the Bay out into the open sea again; and there they fell in with sea-rovers and a great fight sprung up; and they got the victory, and much goods. Among the spoil there was a necklace of fine gold and the best workmanship; and Hallvard took that for his share, and sent it out to Rodny by a trading-ship that was shaping her course toward Iceland. But before he sent it, he showed it to Jofried and said:

"Do you not think that will get me some favor in her eyes?"



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Jofried answered: "Good is the gift, but methinks it would be still better if it were not dumb."

He asked her what she meant by that, and she went on: "I should think any one could see that when Rodny has hung the necklace around her neck, she will think no further about it; but Skapti will sit by her side and be always speaking so as to flatter and gladden her, and the end will be that he will have all her thoughts; for in the whole of Iceland there is not his equal for a quick wit."

Now Hallvard knew himself for a slow-witted man, so his heart went down at this; and thereafter he took no pleasure in the gifts he sent. And from that day forth he grew very silent, so that men noticed it.

At first no one could guess what was at the bottom of it, but soon Jofried repeated everything that she had told him about Skapti.

All spoke against it, in the beginning; but the end was that they believed her. After that the matter was their daily talk, when Hallvard was not by; and the more they talked, the more wroth they became for his sake. At last they went so far as to go before him, one after the other, and beg him not to stop at the Rangrivervales as he had intended, lest Rodny should break the tryst and make a laughing-stock of them, but to hold his course north to the Laxriverdales and send a man back from there to see how the land lay.

Hallvard listened to them all without speaking, but it was easy to see that each piece of advice left him more sick at heart than before.

And now the days run on until the time comes to turn their faces toward Iceland.

Then one night when the shipmates were drinking



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under the tents on the forecastle, Hallvard came among them and said:

"I have taken counsel with myself about what you want of me; and though I will not sail past the Rangri-
vervales as you wish, neither will I ask you to ride up to the trysting-place, as was intended. But we will so manage it that we come to land after sunset, and make a night-camp on the shore; and there we will be that night and the next day. And if it happens that during that time Rodny sends anyone down to us with a bidding, we will ride up to her hall and make the excuse that we could not come before because we had much goods to see to; but if she does not send any welcome down, then — when we have camped on the shore one more night — we will weigh anchor and sail away north."

All said that was a better way than to keep the tryst and run the risk of being laughed at. And now the story goes back to Thorolfstede, and what happened there.

When Hallvard had been away six weeks, a ship came out from Norway and ran into the Rangriver, and a man that was on board came to Thorolfstede and greeted Rodny from Hallvard and gave her the gold finger-ring that Hallvard had sent. And Rodny was glad, and put it on her hand where she could see it all the time that she stood at her loom; and at night the hand that wore it rested under her cheek.

But when the next month had worn away, and that trading-ship came into the river which had on board the necklace that Hallvard had taken from the sea-rovers, Skapti went down to meet her, and sought out Hallvard's man and made him drunk and robbed him of the necklace and threw it into the river. And when the man came into



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his wits again and saw what had befallen him, he was so frightened that he dared not come near Rodny at all, but fled back to the ship and stayed there while she held her course northward. And Skapti came home and told Rodny that no greeting had been sent.

Rodny was rather cast down at first, for she had made sure that the ship would have some word for her. Still it was not long before she had thought of many good reasons why Hallvard might have been hindered from sending; and she looked at her ring more often than before, and was soon light-hearted again. So another month passes away.

Then a third ship came out from Norway, and on her was one of Hallvard's men that had in his keeping for Rodny a brooch of gold with four silver crosses hanging from it. But Skapti went down to meet him, and then it was the same story over again. The man leapt overboard and swam to a ship that was just pulling out for the east. But Skapti went home and told Rodny that no greetings had come.

At that Rodny held her peace for a long while; and once tears came into her eyes, and that was not her way. But still, when Lambi spoke and said that it began to look as if her lover had forgotten her, she answered quickly and said:

"If he has forgotten me, it is in doing deeds that men will praise; and so it may well be forgiven him. And besides, it will not be long now before he remembers me again." And in this way she answered all who found fault with him, and showed herself big-hearted in everything.

But when the Summer had worn away till it lacked



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but five weeks of Winter, a fourth ship came out of the east; and Rodny got no greetings that time either, for the man that was bringing a gold arm-ring to her was in such haste to take passage back again that he handed over his charge to Skapti of his own free will, and rowed out to another ship as fast as he could go. And Skapti threw the gift into the sea, and told Rodny the same lie as before.

Then Rodny could no longer speak up for Hallvard, but sat biting her lips in silence, when Lambi spoke against him and said how much better it was to make bargains with men whose lives she knew all about. Men thought that this time her pride was put to a hard trial. Yet she never spoke any ill words of Hallvard.

And now the time goes on until the last of the days before winter comes. One day at even, Rodny's shepherd came galloping up to the door and said that Hallvard's ship had sailed into the river. Skapti and everyone looked at Rodny; and first her face was as though it were all blood, and then it was as white to look on as the moon.

Skapti thought there was little risk, but that her temper would jump the way he wanted it to, and yet to make sure he spoke up sharp and quick and said:

"Now Hallvard has forgotten much, but one thing I hope he will remember, and that is that he has promised to meet you half-way between your hall and the shore; for you would get the greatest shame if you went down and he was not there."

Then Lambi said: "If you will lean on my counsel, foster-daughter, you will call up your pride and stay at home. Hallvard has broken agreements enough to set



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you free, and more besides; and it is even as my son says, that mocking tongues will not be wanting to shame you if you keep a tryst that your lover has forgotten."

But Rodny, when she had held her peace for a little, answered them slowly and said: "It is true that Hallvard has seemed to forget me, and that my pride has been sorely tried; and it is no less true that if he gives me fresh cause for anger, I may let my temper go as far as it will. But now you both show how little you guess what love is in a woman's breast, or you would know that while there is any chance at all that he may prove himself guiltless of meaning disrespect toward me, I care no more about mocking-tongues than I do about the blowing of the wind."

After that she went away, and at first Skapti thought matters had taken a bad turn. But shortly he saw that it was unlikely that Hallvard would keep the tryst himself, and that would become a fresh cause of strife between them; and then he was merry again.

Now it must be told how Rodny rode the next morning to the trysting-place, and Lambi and Skapti and ten men with her. And when they got there, there was no one to meet them.

"What did I tell you?" said Skapti.

"It is early yet," replied Rodny; and so they sat for a while.

Then there came the noise of hoofs trampling over brush. But it was only one of Rodny's house-carles that had taken horse and come after her to tell her that he had just been up on a high hill that overlooked the river, and there he had seen Hallvard's men camping on the shore, and taking no steps to get ready to ride, but lying about



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on the sand and amusing themselves with the tumbling-girl.

Rodny made him tell it three times over, and then she was so wroth that no one had ever seen any woman so wroth before. She swung her horse about and was for riding home without a word, when Hallvard came out of the wood before her, red in his face and out of breath because he had come on foot from the shore while his mates thought him sleeping on the ship.

As soon as Skapti saw that, it seemed to him that he had got into a luckless state; and he slipped behind a bush and made off toward the shore to find Jofried and scold her for her great falling-off of wit. But Hallvard went up to Rodny and gave her a joyful greeting; and after a little she welcomed him with both hands.

Then he said: "I see that you dislike my tardiness, and I want to beg off from your wrath; for it is the truth that I came as fast as I could."

Rodny said: "But where are your friends, that you come alone and unattended like a man of no honor?"

Hallvard seemed to find that hard to answer, and he waited a while; but at last he said: "I will tell it just as it is and not lie about it. I did not want my mates along for fear that you would not keep faith with me, and I should be put to shame before them. And now I see that I have behaved like a great fool from the beginning; though the reason is that it seemed so wondrous a thing that you should love a man like me, that I could hardly believe it when you were no longer before my eyes."

At that Rodny was so well pleased that she did not want him to see how much pleased she was, and kept her



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eyes on her hands where they lay in his. But shortly he spoke again, and then his voice was a little down-hearted.

“Though I see,” said he, “that you did not like my gifts, since you wear them neither on your neck nor your breast nor your arm. And yet I had hoped that they would please you a little.”

“Gifts!” said Rodny. Then he began to ask questions, and it came out that she had never set eyes on the pretty things.

Hallvard was so wroth that it looked for a while as if some man would have to go down before him. But Rodny took it in quite another way.

“It is to me as though I had got the three best gifts in the world,” said she. “And I care not a whit what became of the gold so long as you remembered to send it.”

With that, she slipped off her horse and put her arms around Hallvard’s neck and kissed him; and thereafter their love ran smoothly enough.

And now all that is left to tell is how Skapti came down to the shore and began to scold Jofried, and she answered in this way:

“No more of the blame for this lies on me than on you; for it is proved by this that though you know much of men’s weaknesses, you know nothing at all about the strong parts of their natures. And now you may have your choice of two things — either you shall take me to wife and give me equal rights with yourself over your goods, or I shall go to Hallvard and tell him everything about this plan, and then you will have his wrath to bear, and you know as well as I whether you would be able to stand up under that.”



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Because he thought he knew enough of her to be sure that she would do as she said if he did not give way to her, Skapti took her to wife; though he thought the choice a hard one. They went away into the east dales to live on a homestead that Lambi gave them; and Jofried stood up for her rights in word and deed.

And here we end the story of how the Norns wove.



HOW THOR RECOVERED HIS HAMMER



HOW THOR RECOVERED HIS HAMMER

In Three Parts.

AS I HAVE TOLD YOU BEFORE, BILSKIRNER, THE PALACE OF THOR THE STRONG-ONE, WAS BUILT IN HIS KINGDOM OF THRU DVANG, THE REALM THAT LAY BEYOND THE THUNDER-CLOUDS. IT was the very largest palace that was ever roofed over, for it had five hundred and forty halls beneath its silver dome; and it was so dazzling bright that when people on earth caught a glimpse of it through the clouds, they blinked and said they had seen lightning. In a tremendous hall in the centre of it, Thor spent most of his time when he was not away fighting giants or attending assembly-meetings. There were benches all around the walls for his followers; gleaming weapons hung above them; a fire blazed on the golden hearth; and in the middle of the line of seats the Strong-One had his splendid shining throne or high-seat.

One would have supposed that such a bright place would have been difficult to sleep in, yet here every night, when the feasting was over, the members of the household stretched themselves on the cushioned benches and took their rest; and here, on this particular morning of



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which I am going to tell you, they all lay sleeping soundly — perhaps even snoring, if the truth were known. Thor leaned back in his high-seat, his red beard tossed up and down by his deep breathing. Loki the Sly-One, who was visiting him, sprawled unconscious among the cushions beside him; even the fire was slumbering and only roused now and then to wink a drowsy red eye down among the embers.

Amid all this peace and comfort, Thor's bushy brows began to frown as though a bad dream were troubling him. You know how proud he was of the hammer that the dwarfs had made for him? He called it The Crusher (Mjolner) because nothing could withstand a blow from it; and always while he slept it stood on the floor leaning against the arm of his seat, within easy reach of his hand. Now he dreamed that Thrym, the giant king, had stolen it and borne it away to his stronghold.

He awoke with a start and sat up and looked about him. He was safe in his own hall, surrounded by his own men. It was impossible that anything could have happened. Yet — just to make sure — he put out his hand and felt for The Crusher.

If you will believe me, it really was gone!

The Strong-One uttered such a shout that down on the earth people thought they had heard a thunder-clap. His hair and his beard rose and quivered like a million tiny flames. He bent over and shook the sleeping Sly-One.

"Mark, now, Loki, what I say! What no one knows on earth or in high heaven — my hammer is stolen!"

Loki was instantly awake. He was a very handsome



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youth and one of the cleverest of all the mighty beings who lived above the clouds. Sometimes he was more clever than honest, which is why I call him the Sly-One. There came a time when he was so wicked that he brought a terrible punishment upon himself. But just now his shrewdness was of great use to Thor.

He answered as soon as he had heard about the dream, "It is likely that you are right and that Thrym is the thief. But it would be unadvisable for you to go to him. You are so fiery that you would kill him before you had learned anything. I will borrow the feather-dress of Freyja the Lovely and do the errand for you."

"I should be very thankful to you," said Thor.

Hastening out, they harnessed to the chariot The-Goat-That-Gnashes-His-Teeth (Tanngnjost) and The-Goat-That-Flashes-His-Teeth (Tanngrisner) and drove to Folkvang, where Freyja's immense palace (Sessrymner) stood. No mansion in the upper world had so many seats for guests as hers; and she was as generous as she was hospitable.

When Thor had told her why they had come, she answered with the sweetest of smiles, "I would give you the dress gladly though it were of gold. Though it were of silver, I would give it to you instantly." And she ordered her attendants to bring it at once from the chest in which it was stored.

Though it was neither of gold nor of silver, yet it was very handsome. It was made of the white and brown plumage of falcons and fitted Loki's graceful body like a glove.

"I only hope no one will think me such a pretty bird



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that he will catch me and shut me in a cage," the Sly-One laughed, rustling his feathers as you have seen canaries do after a bath.

Then he spread his shining wings and flew out of the window, over the world, on and on. By the time the goats had brought Thor back again to Thrudvang, the magic pinions had carried Loki into the Land of the Giants (Jotunheim).

It would almost seem as if Thrym were expecting him, for he had placed himself where he was very easy to find — on a mound in front of the royal cavern. There he sat sunning himself and braiding gold collars for his greyhounds, while half a score of his horses nosed and browsed around him. He was very, very large and very, very old. His long beard and hair glittered like frost, and short glistening hairs grew all over his face and his hands. When Loki alighted before him he did not seem in the least surprised, but looked up with a wicked grin.

"How fare the mighty ones? How fare the elves? Why come you alone to Jotunheim?" he asked.

Loki answered sternly, "I'll fare the mighty ones. I'll fare the elves. Have you concealed the hammer of Thor?"

The giant's grin broadened until the mouth looked like a wide crack across his face. It was evident that he thought he had played a very clever trick. He answered promptly, "I have concealed the hammer of Thor eight lengths beneath the ground. No man brings it back unless he gives me Freyja as my bride."

Freyja the Lovely the bride of such a hoary old monster! Loki burst out laughing. But the giant only turned his back upon him and began talking to his horses



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and running his huge fingers through their snowy manes. They were all of them as large as hail-clouds. It suddenly occurred to Loki that if one of them should chance to step upon him, there would be very little of him left.

There was nothing to do but carry the answer back to Thor. So again he spread the shining wings, leaped into the air, and flew back over the world to Thrudvang.

II

ALTHOUGH he was not long kept waiting, Thor had time to imagine all sorts of unpleasant things — even to fancy that perhaps the Sly-One was playing another of his tricks and would not return at all. The instant Loki in the feather-dress appeared upon the threshold, he called out sternly:

“Have you succeeded in doing your errand? Then give me the message before you sit down. What one tells after he has had time to sit down and think up fibs, is often of little value.”

As Loki happened to be acting honestly for once, he felt somewhat aggrieved at this.

“Well have I succeeded in doing my errand,” he answered; “Thrym the King of Giants has your hammer. No man brings it back unless he gives him Freyja as bride.”

Thor snorted so that his red beard streamed far out, and down on the earth people thought they had seen the fiery northern lights streak across the sky.

“Is it to win her that he has made all this trouble? Ride we to Freyja without delay.”

They mounted the chariot, and in an astonishingly



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short time the lightning-swift goats had drawn them to Folkvang.

Freyja the Lovely sat in her high-seat playing with her wonderful necklace, whose beads sparkled and flashed like water-drops in the sun. When she heard wheels, she guessed that the Strong-One was approaching and came out into the courtyard to meet him.

"I give you good greeting," she said, smiling kindly as Loki flew to her and dropped the feather-dress at her feet.

But she did not smile so sweetly when Thor had reined in the goats before her and told her of the giant's demand.

"Dress yourself, Freyja, in bridal robes," he finished, "together we will ride to Jotunheim."

The Lovely One straightened up so quickly that her hand caught in her necklace and broke it into a shower of sparkling balls.

"Sooner will I die than put on bridal robes for such a monster," she declared.

The Strong-One looked at her in surprise. The hammer was so important to him and to them all that he thought any one ought to be willing to do anything to recover it.

"It is likely that you will die if I do not get The Crusher back," he said at last. "If the giants should invade the sky, I would have nothing to fight them with and they could get the victory over us."

Freyja answered nothing whatever, but she put back her beautiful shining hair from her beautiful rosy face and looked at him sorrowfully. All at once it occurred to Thor that she was much too lovely to be given to such a



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wicked old creature. He made only one more very faint attempt.

"I am told for certain that Thrym has got great riches," he said, "he has a herd of all-black oxen and all his cows have gold horns."

Then Freyja stamped her foot.

"I would be a love-sick maid indeed if with you I would ride to Jotunheim!" she said severely. And with that she left them and ran into the house — and I am not sure that she did not close the door pretty hard behind her.

Thor scratched his head thoughtfully.

"Much goes worse than is expected," he said at last. "We will see now what advice my kinsmen have to offer."

Again he puffed and snorted so that the trees on the earth below were stirred and swayed as by a rushing wind.

"Certainly there is going to be a great storm," the earth-people said to each other. And as they heard the chariot-wheels rumbling along above the clouds, they added, "Hark! Do you hear the thunder?"

They must have thought it a very long storm for before he stopped, Thor had driven to almost every palace in the sky. Odin the All-wise Ruler, Balder the Bright, and Heimdal the White One, Tyr, Brage, Vale — he visited each of them. Soon they were all gathered together at their meeting-place on the plains of Ida.

They consulted long and earnestly. At last Heimdal the White One, who had the gift of fore-knowledge, gave them this counsel:

"It is my advice that we play a trick upon the King



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of the Giants and allow him to believe that we have done as he asked. We will dress Thor in bridal robes and send him to Thrym."

At this, loud laughter went up from the others. You remember that Thor was not only stronger than any man on earth, but he was also mightier than any being in the sky. Imagine dressing him up for a beautiful graceful woman!

"That is cleverly devised!" cried Loki. "With a bridal veil will we hide the red beard, and Thrym shall not know him until the Strong-One has got his hand on his hammer. Then will he know him to his sorrow!"

They all laughed again; but the mighty Thor frowned angrily.

"Never will I submit to it," he growled. "Every living thing would mock at me, should I go dressed in bridal robes."

Perhaps Loki wished to revenge himself on the Strong-One for having spoken so sternly to him when he first brought the message from Jotunheim. Now in his turn he said sternly:

"Be silent, Thor. Stop such talk. Soon will the giants build in the sky if you do not bring your hammer back."

Because he knew this to be true, Thor could say nothing more. He stood frowning and stamping and growling in his beard while they brought Freyja's jewels and her beautiful robes to dress him in.

They put on him a very long gown that trailed about his feet so that he was certain that it would trip him up when he should try to walk. They hung sparkling necklaces around his neck, and placed a bunch of jingling



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keys at his belt to show that he was a good house-keeper. Broad gold broaches they pinned on his breast, and then they braided his red-gold hair into two beautiful wavy braids.

How the Mighty-One did stamp and fume at all this! And how the others laughed at him! The more they laughed, the angrier he grew—and the angrier he became, the funnier he looked in his bridal robes. The whole vault of the sky echoed and re-echoed with their mirth.

At last he was all dressed and they dropped the bridal veil over his furious face.

Then Loki said, with a slim grimace, that such a lovely bride could not be allowed to travel without at least one serving-maid. So he took the dress of one of Freyja's attendants and put it on himself. As he was young and handsome and with no more beard than either you or I, he made a very pretty waiting-damsel.

He got into the chariot beside Thor, the lightning-swift goats were hitched to the car, and away they went to Jotunheim.

III

THE chariot-wheels rumbled like thunder. The-Goat-That-Gnashes-His-Teeth and The-Goat-That-Flashes-His-Teeth struck out fiery sparks from their gold-shod hoofs. So came Loki and the Strong-One into Jotunheim.

While they were yet a long way off, Thrym heard them coming and laughed exultantly.



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"Much wealth have I!
Many gifts have I!
Freyja, methinks, is all I lack!"

he sang; then he called out to his followers, "Giants, arise and spread the embroidered cloths over the benches. Freyja comes to be my bride."

The servants tumbled over each other in wild excitement. Some covered the seats and the walls with embroidered tapestries. Some strewed fresh straw upon the floor. Others scoured the shields and brought in the tables and set forth the massive golden dishes.

Just as twilight was falling, the chariot thundered into the courtyard.

When he saw Freyja's robes and Freyja's jewels, it never occurred to Thrym to doubt that it was really Freyja under the veil. He took the bride's hand and led her to her seat, laughing exultantly and singing his boastful song:

"Much wealth have I!
Many gifts have I!
Freyja, methinks, was all I lacked!"

Then he ordered the food to be brought in, and invited every one to help him keep his wedding-feast.

When they began to eat, it was a wonder that Thor's appetite did not betray him the very first thing. Either he was so hungry that he did not care what they thought, or else he forgot that he was pretending to be a dainty lady. Besides all the cheese and the curds and the honey, he ate seven whole salmon and one whole ox, and after that he drank three barrels of the sweet spicy mead. Loki pinched him under the table as a sign for him to



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stop, but he only growled in his beard and ate one salmon more.

Thrym's eyes grew as big as milk-bowls.

"Saw I never such a hungry bride!" he exclaimed, pushing back to stare at her. "Saw I never a bride eat so much! Saw I never a maid drink so much mead!"

At that, even Thor was a little alarmed, for if the giant king should discover them before they got the hammer, not only would their plan fail but they would lose their lives into the bargain. He could think of nothing to answer, however, so he sat silent. Lucky was it for him that Loki always had his wits about him.

The Sly-One answered quickly, "Hungry is Freyja, thirsty is Freyja, for nothing has she eaten or drunk for eight days—so much did she long to come to Jotunheim."

Thrym's look of surprise changed to one of complacency.

"Is it so indeed!" he exclaimed, and finished his supper very pleasantly.

But by and by he became so pleased with his bride that he wanted to kiss her. Before Thor could hinder it, he reached out his great hairy hand and pulled at the veil. It slipped aside just enough to disclose Thor's furious, fiery eyes.

The giant king sprang back the whole length of the hall.

"Why are Freyja's eyes so sharp?" he cried. "It seems that fire burns in her eyes."

By this time, the Strong-One was so angry that I think he hardly cared what happened. Lucky was it for



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all the folk of the sky that Loki was there to answer for him.

The Sly-One spoke up quickly, "Sharp are Freyja's eyes, fiery are Freyja's eyes. She has not slept for eight nights, so much did she long to come to Jotunheim."

"Is it true indeed!" said Thrym, much flattered that his bride had been so eager to come to him. And he came back and sat down beside her and looked at her affectionately.

Finally the time came for the giving of the bridal gifts. An old sister of Thrym came and bowed low before the bride.

"Give from your hand the golden rings if you desire friendship of me," she demanded, "if you desire friendship of me—and love."

Because he was determined that he would never give her anything but a blow, Thor answered nothing whatever. Thrym feared that his bride was offended by the questions he had asked, so he hastened to do something to appease her.

He called to his servants, "Bring me the hammer to please my bride. Place the hammer on the lap of the maid. Wed us together in the name of Var."

Thor's heart laughed within him when he saw his beloved hammer drawn out of its hiding-place and borne toward him. But he sat as stiff as a stick. Until his hand grasped it, there was still danger. Nearer they came with it. Nearer—and all unsuspecting, they laid it upon his knee.

Then at last Thrym learned how the cleverness of the sky-people surpassed his cleverness. Thor's mighty



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hand closed upon the handle; he threw back the veil; he leaped to his feet. His terrible eyes blazed upon them as his arm flew back to strike.

Once! and Thrym fell dead at his feet. Twice! and the old giantess lay beside her brother. Again and again and again—until the whole race of giants were felled like a forest of towering trees.

Thus came Odin's son again by his hammer.



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